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SUBJECT: SPAIN: MFA OFFICIAL SEES NO CHANGE IN CUBA POLICY

Classified By: Political Counselor Kathleen M. Fitzpatrick, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: Poloff met May 18 with Pablo Gomez de Olea, the MFA's deputy director general for Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean. Gomez assured us the Zapatero government will maintain a tough stance on Cuba and will not unilaterally backtrack on the EU's strict common position on Cuba. In Gomez de Olea's opinion, although a minority of the Socialist Party (PSOE) would like to see President Rodriguez Zapatero soften Spain's position on Cuba and open some kind of dialog with Fidel Castro, the majority of Socialists do not believe progress is possible with Castro and back the tough line Spain has taken consistent with the EU. End summary.

2. (C) With Minister of Foreign Affairs Miguel Angel Moratinos' recent meeting with his Mexican counterpart Derbez as a backdrop, poloff met May 18 with Gomez de Olea to "take the MFA's temperature" on the outlook for GOS relations with Cuba under the Zapatero administration. Moratinos had commented after his discussions with Derbez that Spain wanted to take a "calm" approach to Cuba. Gomez de Olea emphasized that in his opinion there will be no change in Spain's policy toward Cuba under the Zapatero government. "The minister may have used some unfortunate verbiage," he said, "but the fact is, even if Zapatero wanted to soften Spain's tough stance it would be very difficult to do it because the EU common position on Cuba is very strict, and Zapatero is very much in favor of following the EU position on this and other issues.

3. (C) Gomez de Olea acknowledged there are those in PSOE who would like to see Zapatero renew some kind of dialog with Castro (the far left-leaning Socialists) but the majority of PSOE officials understand dialog with Castro has produced no progress in the past and will not produce more in the future. Although Zapatero is not likely to deliver the same degree of vitriol to Castro in his public statements as Aznar did, the Zapatero government will act consistently with the EU, demanding the release of dissident prisoners and the beginning of democratic changes on the island.

4. (C) Finally Gomez de Olea remarked that the substantial economic interests Spanish companies have on the island will not pressure the Zapatero government to moderate Spain's position on Cuba. For some time, Castro himself has seen the wisdom of separating the two, understanding that he will only cause himself economic pain if he makes life difficult for Spanish businesses.

ARGYROS